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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage June 22 on the release of a convicted "rice bomber" Thursday after President Chen Shui-bian granted him a special pardon; on the Basic Competence Test for junior high school students island-wide; on the 2008 presidential election; and on soaring Taiwan shares. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran an exclusive news story on page eight with the headline "Frank Hsieh: [I Am] for the Referendum on the Island's UN Bid under the Name Taiwan." The pro-unification "United Daily News," however, carried a news story on page four with the headline "[U.S. President] Bush Likely to Criticize Bian in Public Again."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" criticized President Chen for his "detestable and stupid" referendum proposal, which will deteriorate Taiwan-U.S. relations and endanger Taiwan's security. The "Black and White" column in the "United Daily News" also chimed in, saying that it is the Taiwan people who will have to endure the damage done to Taiwan-U.S. relations incurred by President Chen's proposed referendum. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" criticized President Chen for using Taiwan's UN bid to influence the presidential election. A "Liberty Times" editorial, however, criticized the United States for its opposition to Taiwan's UN bid. The article said the United States has deviated from the values of democracy and freedom. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said "it is better to be rejected by the UN when applying as 'Taiwan' than to be accepted under a name not befitting a sovereign nation." A separate "Taipei Times" op-ed, written by U.S. Congressional Research Service policy analyst Shirley Kan, discussed the origins of the Taiwan Relations Act and the "Six Assurances" made by the Reagan administration in 1982. Kan said the "U.S. policy focuses on the process of resolution of the Taiwan question, not its outcome," and that "it is not very satisfactory or fair." End summary.

A) "The Stupid Referendum That Harms the [Taiwan] People and [the DPP's] Comrade"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] editorialized (6/22):

"Chen Shui-bian is pushing for a referendum again, and its topic is '[Taiwan's] bid to join the United Nations under the name Taiwan.' Rarely does one see the president of a democratic country who likes to toy with referenda and play tricks to sabotage other people. ... Bian's trap has failed to harm Ma Ying-jeou; instead, it has sabotaged Frank Hsieh and put him in an awkward position. Hsieh is forced to clarify his stand [on the issue] to the United States. If he said he supports [Chen's initiative], he will not be able to win U.S. support, and he might even be faced with difficulties or ask for an insult. But if he expresses opposition to the referendum, he will upset Bian, who can play tricks behind Hsieh's back and harm

his campaign. [Bian's] abuse of solemn and sacred referenda to hurt other people ends up hurting his own comrades, spoiling Taiwan-U.S. relations, and endangering Taiwan's security. It is really detestable and stupid."

B) "A Slap in the Face"

The "Black and White" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] wrote (6/22):

"... Regardless of what Bian's mindset was [in terms of his attempt to hold a referendum on Taiwan's UN bid under the name Taiwan], what he has done was akin to slapping [AIT Chairman Raymond] Burghardt hard in the face. But the United States' counterattack came quickly and ruthlessly. The State Department immediately mentioned Bian's name and indicated in a tough manner its opposition to Bian's proposed referendum. It also pointed out that such an initiative appears designed to alter Taiwan's status quo and will certainly increase tensions in the Taiwan Strait. Even though Bian asked for a slap in the face himself, the damage he has done to Taiwan-U.S. relations will have to be endured by all the Taiwan people. ..."

C) "U.N. Bid Intended to Influence Elections"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (6/22):

"Practically everything President Chen Shui-bian recently said in public has generated much controversy. He probably did so deliberately, as a series of major elections are at hand. He and his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are probably beating their brains out to devise effective campaign tactics. ... The question is not whether the United States can force Taiwan to deny its sovereignty. The real question is whether Taiwan wants the U.S. to help defend itself in case of a military attack by mainland China. If President Chen violates his promise not to seek Taiwan

independence during his term, he and his party will lose the trust and the support of the island's most important ally."

D) "How Can the United States Deviate from the Values of Democracy and Freedom and Oppose 'Taiwan's' Participation in the United Nations?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 500,000] editorialized (6/22):

"... It is a demonstration of the spirit of democracy to decide on a major issue and to resolve differences between two sides through the method of referenda. Various elections in the United States were often held in tandem with referenda on local or national issues. A referendum is already part of the normality of democracy. Thus, Washington's opposition to Taiwan's holding a referendum on the island's UN bid under the name Taiwan is obviously [a decision] made from the perspective of international politics, and it is unrelated to the fundamental values of democracy and human rights. In other words, the United States sees the referendum as a diplomatic issue rather than the yearning of the 23 million Taiwan people for the island's room for survival in the international community. The United States' intention and its apprehension of China's pressure is understandable, but the Taiwan people will by no means identify with its opposition to [Taiwan's plan to hold a] referendum. Taiwan's holding a referendum on its UN bid under the name Taiwan is a move not only to pursue the benefits that the Taiwan people deserve but also to express the island's willingness to fulfill its obligations as a member of the international community. The U.S. opposition has not only deviated from its founding spirit of democracy and freedom but also damaged the ideals of the world commonwealth. ..."

E) "'Taiwan' Is Worth Fighting for"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (6/22):

"At the expense of ruffling feathers in Washington, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is pushing ahead with a national referendum on joining the UN under the name 'Taiwan.' Considering the somewhat frayed relationship between President Chen Shui-bian's

administration and the US, the tit-for-tat exchanges have hardly been surprising. While the DPP is doing little to endear itself to the ever-irritable US State Department, its strategy naturally serves a domestic purpose. By trying to connect the referendum to next year's elections, Chen hopes pro-green-camp voters will turn out in higher numbers. ...

"While applying to international agencies under the name 'Taiwan' does not usually meet with success -- as demonstrated by its WHO bid this spring -- it is important for Taiwan to maintain a standard. And it is better to be rejected by the UN when applying as 'Taiwan' than to be accepted under a name not befitting a sovereign nation."

F) "The TRA and Reagan's Assurances"

Shirley Kan, a policy analyst at the Congressional Research Service (CRS) in Washington, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (6/22):

"US policy is not perfect. The US' 'one China' policy is frequently criticized. Some say it lacks sufficient clarity, credibility and coherence. Others argue that it lacks consistency. Still others call it dangerous. Sometimes, the policy seems secretive and contradictory. US policy could be more supportive of the Taiwanese and their quest for international recognition. ...

"In other words, US policy focuses on the process of resolution of the Taiwan question, not its outcome. It is not very satisfactory or fair. But if Taipei pushes for a clearer US position on the status of Taiwan, it might be even less satisfied."

YOUNG